

CIA read senators' letters

Nixon's mail also opened, Church says

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Washington—The Central Intelligence Agency, as part of a 20-year mail-surveillance program, opened and read the mail of many prominent Americans, including at least one letter to Richard M. Nixon before he became president, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities disclosed yesterday.

Senator Frank Church (D., Idaho) also said the committee had decided unanimously to call Mr. Nixon to testify on a broad range of topics relating to its investigation of domestic intelligence activities.

Mr. Church, in opening a second day of public hearings on this subject, said CIA files showed that the agency had read letters to or from Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D., Minn.); Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D., Mass.); Representative Bella S. Abzug (D., N.Y.); the late Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his wife, Coretta; Arthur F. Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; John D. Rockefeller 4th, and one letter he himself had written to his mother-in-law.

Mail addressed to the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and to Harvard University also was opened and read, Mr. Church said.

He added that the committee would want to know why mail to such persons and groups was "regularly opened and scrutinized by the CIA against the laws of the country."

The existence of a mail-surveillance program, generally thought to cover letters to and from Communist countries, had been known before, but except for Mrs. Abzug, the names of particular individuals or groups surveyed were not known.

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Mr. Church said a letter to Mr. Nixon was sent by Raymond Price in June, 1968, from the Soviet Union to Mr. Nixon's address at his New York city law firm. The letter included comments on Mr. Nixon's election prospects as of that time, when he was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. Mr. Price later served as a White House speechwriter while Mr. Nixon was president.

The letter he sent to his mother-in-law also was mailed from the Soviet Union, Mr. Church said.

He indicated that he was extremely displeased to learn that such mail had been opened and read by others. "My mother-in-law and I get along very well," Senator Church said, "but I intended to say things to her and not to the CIA."

He noted that the names he had read out were never on the CIA's so-called "watch list" of people or groups who presumably might be involved in foreign intelligence activities. "So it is obvious that in the opening of mail they have gone very far afield indeed," Mr. Church said.

Senator Walter F. Mondale (D., Minn.), another committee member, objected to the surveillance of mail going to several names placed on the "watch list," including Linus Pauling, a scientist; John Steinbeck, an author, and Victor Reuther, a labor leader and brother of the late Walter Reuther, former head of the United Auto Workers Union.

Mr. Mondale, in questioning James Angleton, former head of counter-intelligence for the CIA, asked: "What was the CIA's objective?" in opening the mail of such people.

Mr. Angleton, who retired from the agency last winter after a series of newspaper stories disclosed extensive CIA involvement in domestic-intelligence matters, said he would prefer to answer the question in closed session.

He acknowledged that the mail openings were illegal but said that "from a counter-intelligence point of view, we believed that it was extremely important to know any possible contacts of American citizens with Communist countries."

He also sought to distinguish between surveillance of letters sent to and from addresses within the U.S. and those sent to and from foreign countries.

"Our program had nothing to do with impinging on or harming Americans," Mr. Angleton said.

On the subject of Mr. Nixon's possible testimony, Senator Church said the former president would be questioned about the short-lived Huston plan to permit several intelligence agencies to violate the law at times in efforts to investigate domestic subversion.